

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00  
NSCE-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00 NSC-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00  
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AMEMBASSY OSLO  
AMEMBASSY PARIS  
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM  
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN  
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK  
USMISSION SINAI

C O N F I D E N T I A L T E L A V I V 6621

E.O.11652: GDS  
TAGS: MOPS, IS, LE  
SUBJ: REACTION TO CABINET DECISION TO WITHDRAW FROM SOUTH LEBANON

1. SUMMARY: REACTION TO THE GOI'S ANNOUNCED INTENTION TO WITHDRAW  
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BY JUNE 13 HAS BEEN MUTED. FEW ISRAELIS FAVORED INDEFINITE  
OCCUPATION OF SOUTH LEBANON AND MOST HAD HOPED THAT AN EARLY  
FINIS COULD HAVE BEEN WRITTEN TO THE INCURSION. WHILE ALIGNMENT  
POLITICIANS READ INTO THE VAGUE CABINET STATEMENT THE POSSIBILITY  
OF PRECONDITIONS TO WITHDRAWAL, THE PRESS, COALITION MKS AND MORE  
AUTHORITATIVELY, MINISTER MODAI'I MAINTAIN THAT THE JUNE 13  
DATE IS FINAL. HOWEVER, WEIZMAN TOLD US THE WITHDRAWAL HAS YET

TO BE COORDINATED WITH UNIFIL. THE GOVERNMENT IS MAKING THE MOST OF THE GENERAL PERCEPTION THAT UNIFIL IS DOING A GOOD JOB IN PREVENTING THE RETURN OF TERRORISTS, IN ORDER TO CLAIM A LASTING ACHIEVEMENT FOR "OPERATION LITANI." ISRAELIS WILL BE RELIEVED WHEN THE WHOLE AFFAIR IS BEHIND THEM, PROVIDED THE GOOD FENCE AND CHRISTIAN ENCLAVES ARE PROTECTED AND A REASONABLE INTERVAL OF QUIET PREVAILS ON THEIR NORTHERN FRONTIER. END SUMMARY

2. THE CABINET DECISION OF MAY 21 TO COMPLETE THE IDF WITHDRAWAL FROM SOUTH LEBANON BY JUNE 13 HAS GENERATED LITTLE INTEREST IN THE KNESSET OR IN THE COUNTRY AT LARGE. ISRAELIS HAVE BEEN AWARE OF PRESSURES ON THE GOI TO LEAVE LEBANON, AND THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO SET A DATE FOR DEPARTURE CAME AS NO GREAT SURPRISE. IN ADDITION, ISRAELIS HAVE EXHIBITED GROWING INDIFERENCE TO LEBANON, AS THE AIRCRAFT PACKAGE DEAL PUSHED EVENTS NORTH OF THE BORDER OFF THE FRONT PAGES.

3. LABOR MKS, SKEPTICAL AS ALWAYS OF THE GOVERNMENT INTENTIONS, HAVE ARGUED TO US THAT THE VAGUENESS OF THE CABINET STATEMENT LEAVES THE GOVERNMENT THE OPTION OF POSTPONING THE PULL-OUT. INDEED, ON MAY 22 DEFENSE MINISTER WEIZMAN TOLD ARMY ATTACHE THAT ISRAEL HAD NOT YET COORDINATED THE WITHDRAWAL WITH SIIL-ASVUO, "AND IF HE WANTS US TO STAY UNTIL 13 AUGUST OR LATER WE WILL. BUT RIGHT NOW WE INTEND TO LEAVE ON 13 JUNE." ACCORDING TO ENERGY MINISTER YITZHAK MODA'I, THE CABINET ATTACHED NO CONDITIONS TO THIS DECISION. HE SAID SOME MINISTERS HAD WANTED TO

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HEDGE THE GOI COMMITMENT, BUT THEY DID NOT PREVAIL. ASKED HOW THE CABINET VOTED, MODA'I REPLIED, "THERE WAS NO VOTE." AFTER THE DISCUSSION, BEGIN SIMPLY ASSERTED THAT "THE SENSE OF THE CABINET" WAS TO WITHDRAW.

4. COALITION MKS ALSO STRESSED THAT THE DECISION IS UNCONDITIONAL. SHMUEL TOLEDANO (DMC) SAID THERE COULD BE A SLIPPAGE OF A FEW DAYS, BUT A COMPLETE WITHDRAWAL IN MID-JUNE IS A FOREGOING CONCLUSION. YEHUDA BEN-MEIR (NRP) AGREED AND NOTED THAT UNIFIL'S EFFECTIVENESS HAD EXCEEDED ISRAEL'S EARLY EXPECTATIONS, WHICH WERE ADMITTEDLY LOW. HE ECHOED THE PRAISE OF GENERAL ERSKINE THAT HAS BEEN EXPRESSED BY GOVERNMENT LEADERS. BEN-MEIR ALSO FOUND WALDHEIM'S ATTITUDE POSITIVE AND ADDED THAT THE SECRETARY GENERAL KNOWS THIS IS A TEST CASE FOR THE UN AND IS ACTING ACCORDINGLY. BEN-MEIR SAID ISRAEL HARDLY EXPECTS THE UN TO SEAL OFF SOUTH LEBANON HERMETICALLY, BUT THERE IS A VAST GULF BETWEEN OCCASIONAL AND ISOLATED INFILTRATION AND THE SETTING UP OF PALESTINIAN HEADQUARTERS, TRAINING FACILITIES, STRONG POINTS, ETC. ISRAEL, HE CONCLUDED, CERTAINLY EXPECTS THE UN TO PREVENT ANY SUCH REASSERTION OF PALESTINIAN STRENGTH IN SOUTH LEBANON.

5. COMMENT: THE GOI IS TOUTING UN EFFECTIVENESS TO ARGUE THE

SUCCESS OF "OPERATION LITANI." ALIGNMENT MKS FIND THIS CAMPAIGN POLITICALLY SELF-SERVING ON THE PART OF THE GOVERNMENT, BUT MOST ISRAELIS HAVE BEEN GENUINELY SURPRISED AND DELIGHTED BY UNIFIL'S WILLINGNESS TO STAND UP TO THE PLO. AT THE SAME TIME, INITIAL ISRAELI SATISFACTION WITH THE IDF INCURSION HAS OVER THE WEEKS GIVEN WAY TO PARTISAN RECRIMINATION AND OUTSPOKEN PRESS CRITICISM OF THE ENTIRE OPERATION. DESPITE THE RELUCTANCE OF ISRAELIS TO ADMIT THAT THE IDF IN LEBANON WAS LESS THAN A COMPLETE SUCCESS, THE WHOLE AFFAIR HAS LEFT A BAD TASTE HERE. WHILE MAINTAINING THEIR ATTACHMENT TO THE "GOOD FENCE" AND THEIR COMMITMENT TO SECURITY FOR THE ENCLAVES, MOST ISRAELIS WILL BE GRATEFUL TO CUT THEIR LOSSES IN SOUTH LEBANON AND HOPE FOR A DECENT INTERVAL FREE FROM TERRORIST ATTACKS FROM THE NORTH. END COMMENT

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## Message Attributes

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